
THE SOURCE AMERICA TAPES

This essay was produced in a review on transcriptions from the leaking tapes of Source Americas, exposed by WikiLeaks, on November 16th, 2015. The author of this document, known on the web by the nickname Praxis (@enterpraxis), is an academic researcher, activist and journalist.

Abstract

The statements and allegations in the tape recordings of Jean M. Robinson, SourceAmerica's former General Counsel, that have been raised in some media stories and lawsuits are factually inaccurate and untrue. Several lawsuits have been filed in recent years accusing AbilityOne and SourceAmerica of awarding contracts not on the basis of merit, but rather through unfair influence by decision-makers who have interest in the outcome. What's more, none of the companies operating illegally were disciplined in any way, according to sources.

REVIEWING THE SOURCEAMERICA TAPES

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WikiLeaks¹ publishes the 30 hours of secret tapes and transcripts at the heart of the AbilityOne²/SourceAmerica³ scandal

Introduction

WikiLeaks, the whistleblower organization, has released 30 hours of audiotapes and transcripts to demonstrate appointees of the Obama and George W. Bush administrations in a multi-billion dollar corruption scandal involving a federal disability program. The conversations took place between 2013 and 2014, revealing that federal officials from both administrations misappropriated funds in a government program called **AbilityOne** – the largest employment program for disabled people in the United States.

The organization WikiLeaks has allegedly revealed that more than half of \$2.3 billion, money considered distributed by the non-profit **SourceAmerica**, went to defense contractor and other major corporations that did not employ enough disabled people to qualify for the federal money, including the Department of Defense and contractors (which kept in secret during the records) like Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman and Boeing. Nonetheless, the tapes were leaked through conversations between the lead of SourceAmerica, **Jean Robinson** and **Ruben Lopez**, CEO of Bona Fide Conglomerate Inc, one of the placement organizations. The AbilityOne Commission maintains a sort of shopping list of goods and services that are available for federal agencies to purchase. The regulations for federal

¹ WikiLeaks said that the result of the misappropriations "is billions in tax payer funded labour subsidies and increased profits for the placement organizations." For more details, read it on: <<https://wikileaks.org/sourceamerica-tapes/background.html>> Visited on 20 Nov 2015.

² AbilityOne is a federal program that offers job opportunities to almost 50,000 people with disabilities, making it the single largest employer of people with significant disabilities in the nation

³ SourceAmerica is a United States non-profit agency that supports other agencies which provide employment opportunities for people who are severely disabled.

purchasing are notoriously convoluted, but generally speaking, when federal agencies wish to purchase from AbilityOne before considering other vendors. If a federal agency wishes to buy pens, for example, and AbilityOne offers them at a fair market price, in most cases they must purchase their pens through AbilityOne.

The factual problem pushes into SourceAmerica and NIB⁴ partnership. SourceAmerica is the larger of the two nonprofits⁵. It works with close to 600 organizations that provide good and services through the AbilityOne program, including Goodwill Industries – clearly mentioned by Robinson and Lopez, during the recording. However, to sum up the 30 hours of concealment, the investigations indeed establish corruption on the part of SourceAmerica and AbilityOne, it is unclear what will happen to these programs. Thousands of vulnerable workers may be at risk of losing their livelihoods, while facing tragically high barriers finding the independence and the right provided by a job. In the middle of the recording, the federal investigators had already informed them of their intention to analyze meeting minutes.

1st Tape Section – San Antonio

Audio #1.1 (2013-05-08): The conversation on going between Ruben Lopez (CEO of Bona Fide Conglomerate Inc.) and Jean Robinson, Lead Counsel of SourceAmerica until 2014, was taken by a random discussion where both exchanged information containing intimacies from each other about other people surrounded at the agency, specially women employees that used to coordinate actions for the employment opportunities, planning a supposedly conspiracy during a partnership. At the end of the recording, at 14:55, Robinson leaves for a reunion, where she would soon bring it up a new supporter.

Audio #1.2 (2013-07-23): Robinson and Lopez returns in a phone call, about a partnership from AbilityOne Program – source of employment for people with disabilities by providing services for the Federal Government – and a meeting that would have many knock-down supporters, what leaded both to start a conspiracy about financial goals of the employment program for disability. Robinson advised Lopez to avoid media attention at the moment.

Audio #1.3 (2013-05-06): This record, stated by Jean and Ruben, both mention Jim Gibbons, the

⁴ National Industries for the Blind. Read on: <http://www.abilityone.gov/abilityone_network/cnas.html> Visited on 20 Nov 2015.

⁵ SourceAmerica releases a statement earlier this year denying those claims: "SourceAmerica conducts its business with the utmost integrity and complies with all federal and state requirements, including those related to the administration of the AbilityOne Program. The allegations being made against SourceAmerica are simply without merit." - The Telegraph, 16 November 2015.

president of Goodwill Industries and Obama's pick for the newly formed White House Council for Community Solution, whose was seen as a bad decision for the program' process.

2nd Tape Section - Phone

Audio – from #2.1 to #2.4 (5, 6 and 16/2013): Amongst the highlights, are Robinson explaining what a “fall guy” is, after the fact that Goodwill was given competitor's business plans and discussing John Huggins' letter of resignation. In another statement, Ruben claims that Jim Gibbons allegedly fought for a \$7 million contract by not allowing other companies to bid without a business plan – and when they submitted one he nicked it. Huggins, in his resignation letter, said that the staff weren't paying attention to legal advice, and he objected to the sexual relationships going on in the organisation (See Audio #1.1). Jean Robinson noted that Huggins didn't mention “steering of contracts” or the fact that there was a massive conflict of interests regarding Goodwill' \$7 million.

3th Tape Section- Berkeley

Audio – from #3.1 to #3.8 (Jan/Feb/Oct 2014 – Jan/2014): In this section, Lopez and Robinson shamelessly declare that almost half of the funds go to defense contractors and major corporations rather than disable people. During the conversation, Jean claims that ten officials appointed by President Barack Obama and three appointed by former President Bush were allegedly involved in the misappropriations. At the end of the phone talk, Lopez demonstrates how they should be more committed to the financial goals as confidential as possible.

4th Tape Section – Phone

Audio #4.1 (2013-25-09): During the recording, Robinson is heard describing her firsthand observations of ongoing conflicts of interests and mismanagement among the higher-ups at SourceAmerica. Still in this section, she described a scene of back-scratching and underhanded deals in which SourceAmerica recommended federal contracts not for the most deserving organizations, but for their friends.

5th Tape Section – Phone

Audio – from #5.1 to #5.3 (December 12th/2013 – January 3-6/2014) Robinson expressed her belief that she was sidelined as she attempted to rope the organization into good governance. She

also repeatedly denounces what she describes as “scheming” by a “mafia” or “allocation machine” when it's about PRIDE; that is, a group of insiders at SourceAmerica who unfairly award lucrative contracts to themselves and to allies. Also, during the recorded conversation, Robinson describes SourceAmerica insiders attempting to hide a pattern of conflicts of interest and favoritism in the recommendation of contracts from federal investigations.

6th Tape Section – Phone

Audio – #6.1 and #6.2 (18/19 November 2013): On this section, Robinson suggests the executives at SourceAmerica wrongly blamed her for their legal woes, telling Lopez that they had hired outside counsel to investigate without informing her. She adds that the outside counsel found fault with her legal department for not strictly enforcing documentation of conflicts of interest. Throughout this recording, Robinson depicts an organization that awards contracts unfairly, selecting those organizations that have a connection to SourceAmerica.

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